Aruba TODAY

The Story of Aruba's Tourism Recounted by Evert Bongers



ORANJESTAD – Evert Bongers is a historian at heart. As a French teacher and guidance counselor on the staff at Aruba's premier high school, Colegio Arubano, he dedicates his spare time to the gathering of facts on his website www.historiadiaruba.aw, and to prolific writing.



Among his published works, Augustus Scur, describing a period of inter-island political unrest in August of 1977, and Creating One Happy Island, the story of Aruba's Tourism, recently published on the occasion of the island's 50-years-of-tourism celebration.

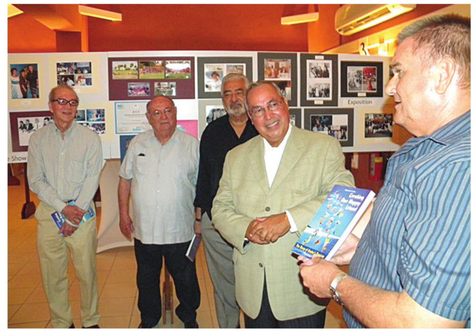
While born in Holland, Bongers spend his early school-years on Aruba as his parents spent a few years working here. He still tells the story of a certain Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1959 when dressed in his Sunday-best he toured with his parents the gorgeous, just-completed Aruba Caribbean hotel, on Palm Beach, no doubt a life changing event, since in 1977, Bongers came back to the island as an accomplished professional. Having graduated a Dutch university, he threw himself into this community's life, as a French teacher and volunteer, organizing windsurfing activities, races and sailing regattas, lately also serving as the emcee of the Bailey's Quiz Night, every Tuesday, at the Plaza Café, a most popular brain-teasing activity.



The book, Creating One Happy Island, the story of Aruba's Tourism, privately published by Bongers has 160 pages, and is filled with historical pictures and facts, tracing the development of tourism here since the '20s and focusing on the '50s and there on, as paradise opened its doors, and life as we know it began.

Bongers interviewed dozens of people, and dug into archives, restoring and retouching long lost images and forgotten stories. While 50 years isn't much in historical terms, Aruba transitioned from practically nothing to everything in a short period in time, and in its rush to move forward and catch up with the rest of the world, develop economically and socially, little attention was paid to the preservation of historical documentation.

While "Let the Old Make Way for the New," helped the island evolve into a strong global brand, it now reached the point where nostalgia is in, and retro styles are much appreciated. Bongers, driven to fill in the island's memory lapses and gaps, tells the story of tourism as it is, in the voices of the pioneers and the key people who made it happen. He also offers historical timelines, and statistics which prove that it's absolutely true that "If You Build It, They Will Come."



The book will be available in gift and book stores, and will definitely be read in local schools, as it pays homage to those who worked very hard to create Aruba One Happy Island, for visitors and locals.

Pictured here the book launch at the National Museum attended by Myrna Jansen and her crew at the Aruba Tourism Authority and pioneers Raymond Maduro, Michael Kuiperi, Harold Malmberg, Watty Chai, Raphael Estrada, Jan de Ruyter, contributing writer Fern Pochettino and press members.❑



